

# Burundi

Beautiful Burundi has been blighted by a generation of ethnic conflict, but with the advent of peace, this charming country may at long last be able to put its dark past to rest. A tiny little nation of soaring mountains and languid lakeside communities, Burundi is sandwiched between the African giants of Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Tanzania. The scenery is stunning and the welcome warm, and it may once again begin to receive a trickle of travellers as the word gets out that the war is over.

The steamy capital Bujumbura has a lovely location on the shores of Lake Tanganyika and just outside the city are some of the finest inland beaches on the continent. Ask the old Africa hands about Burundi before the war, and it is the sort of place they go misty-eyed about and hark back to the life of the lotus-eaters. Sadly there has been no lotus-eating for most Burundians during more than a decade of violence.

Many of the upcountry attractions have been off limits for years, but the stunning scenery and warmth of the Burundians more than compensates. Choose from the southernmost source of the Nile, the ancient forest of Parc National de la Kibira or the spot where Stanley was reputed to have uttered those timeless words 'Dr Livingstone I presume?'.

Intertribal tensions have devastated the country since independence in 1962 and there is always a chance things could kick off again. It is a young peace, so make sure you do your homework before embarking on an adventure in Burundi.

## FAST FACTS

- **Area** 27,830 sq km
- **ATMs** There are no ATMs; come with cash
- **Borders** DRC, Rwanda, Tanzania
- **Budget** US\$20 a day
- **Capital** Bujumbura
- **Languages** Kirundi, French
- **Money** Burundi franc; US\$1= BFr1040
- **Population** 8 million
- **Seasons** Wet (mid-March to mid-May, October-January); dry (mid-May to mid-October, mid-December to mid-March)
- **Telephone** Country code **257**; international access code **00**
- **Time** GMT/UTC +2
- **Visas** Required by all; US\$40 for one month



## HIGHLIGHTS

- **Bujumbura** (p613) Dine out in style before dancing the night away in this city where people love to live it up.
- **Saga Beach** (p614) Hit the best inland beaches in East Africa for some fun in the sun.
- **Source Du Nil** (p616) Journey to Burundi's very own pyramid, marking the southernmost source of the Nile at Kasumo.
- **Being in Burundi** (opposite) Enjoy the novelty of being pretty much the only tourist in the country.
- **La Pierre de Livingstone et Stanley** (p616) Visit the rock where those fateful words 'Dr Livingstone I presume?' were uttered.

## CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

The climate in Burundi varies widely depending on whether you are in the hot and steamy lowlands around Lake Tanganyika, where temperatures average 30°C, or the more mountainous north, where the usual temperature is a much milder 20°C.

## ITINERARIES

- **Two Weeks** It is hard to talk of itineraries in such a small country with a long history of civil war. Most people do a hit and run on Bujumbura (p613), entering via Rwanda. Assuming peace holds, it is likely travellers will continue south along the shores of Lake Tanganyika to link up with Gombe Stream National Park (p781) in western Tanzania.

## TRAVEL IN BURUNDI

Burundi was engulfed in civil war for more than a decade and although progress towards peace has been steady, it remains a potentially unstable country in an unstable region. Travel to the capital Bujumbura was safe at the time of research, as was the main road north to Rwanda. Assuming things continue to stabilise, Burundi may once again find itself on the overland map of Africa, as it is a great way to link Uganda and Rwanda with western Tanzania. Check, double check and triple check the latest security situation before heading into the country or travelling anywhere beyond Bujumbura.

## HOW MUCH?

- **Cheap hotel room** US\$20 to US\$40
- **Plate of garnished brochettes** US\$2
- **Internet access per hour** US\$1 to US\$2
- **Local newspaper** US\$0.50
- **100km bus ride** US\$2

## LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **1L petrol** US\$1
- **1L bottled water** US\$0.50
- **Primus beer** US\$1
- **Souvenir T-shirt** There aren't any!
- **Grilled goat brochettes** US\$0.50

## HISTORY

The original Burundians were the Twa Pygmies, but they were soon squeezed out by bigger groups. First came the Hutu, mostly farmers of Bantu stock, from about 1000 AD. Later, in the 16th and 17th centuries, the tall, pastoral Tutsi from Ethiopia and Uganda arrived. Relations were cordial, but the Tutsi gradually subjugated the Hutu in a feudal system similar to that of medieval Europe.

At the end of the 19th century Burundi and Rwanda were colonised by Germany, but after WWI the League of Nations mandated Rwanda-Urundi to Belgium. Taking advantage of the status quo, the Belgians ruled through the Tutsi chiefs and princes. The establishment of coffee plantations, and the resulting concentration of wealth in the hands of the Tutsi elite, provoked tensions between the two tribal groups.

## Independence Days

In the 1950s a nationalist organisation based on unity between the tribes was founded under the leadership of the mwami's eldest son, Prince Rwagasore. But in the lead up to independence he was assassinated with the connivance of the colonial authorities, who feared their commercial interests would be threatened if he took power.

Despite this setback, it appeared that Burundi was headed for a majority government following independence in 1962. But in the 1964 elections, Mwami Mwambutsa refused to appoint a Hutu prime minister, even though Hutu candidates were the clear winners. Hutu

frustration boiled over, and Hutu military officers and political figures staged an attempted coup. A wholesale purge of Hutu from the army and bureaucracy followed.

In 1972 another large-scale revolt resulted in more than 1000 Tutsi killed. The Tutsi military junta responded with selective genocide: any Hutu with wealth, a formal education or a government job was rooted out and murdered, often in the most horrifying way. After three months, 200,000 Hutu had been killed and another 100,000 had fled the country.

## Stalemate

In 1976 Jean-Baptiste Bagaza came to power in a bloodless coup. During the Bagaza years, there were some half-hearted attempts by the Tutsi government to remove some of the main causes of intertribal conflict, but these were mostly cosmetic.

Bagaza was toppled in September 1987 in a coup led by his cousin Major Pierre Buyoya. The new regime attempted to address the causes of intertribal tensions yet again by gradually bringing Hutu representatives back into positions of power in the government.

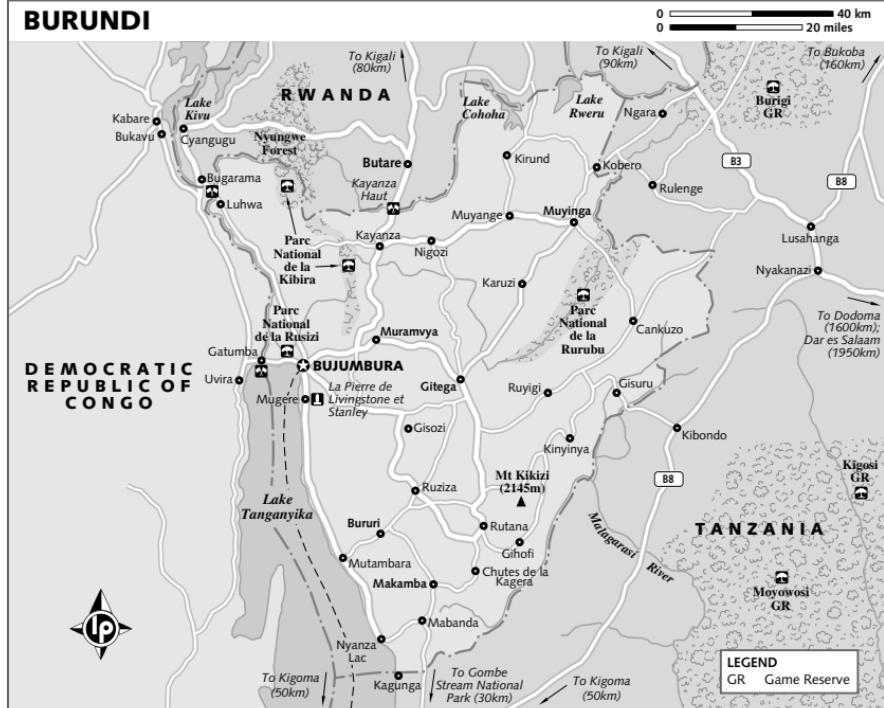
## Civil War Breaks Out

Buyoya eventually bowed to international pressure and allowed multiparty elections in June 1993. These brought a Hutu-dominated government to power, led by Melchior Ndadaye. But he was assassinated by a dissident army faction in October. The coup failed, but in the chaos that followed the assassination, thousands were massacred in intertribal fighting.

In April 1994 the new president, Cyprien Ntaryamira (a Hutu), died in the infamous plane crash that killed Rwanda's President Habyarimana and sparked the planned genocide there. Back in Burundi, both Hutu militias and the Tutsi-dominated army went on the offensive. No war was actually declared, but at least 100,000 people were killed in clashes between mid-1994 and mid-1996. In July 1996 the former president, Pierre Buyoya, again carried out a successful coup and took over as the country's president with the support of the army.

Peace talks staggered on during the conflict, mediated first by former Tanzanian president Julius Nyerere and later the revered Nelson

## **BURUNDI**



Mandela. A breakthrough came in April 2003, when President Buyoya handed over power to Hutu leader Domitien Ndayizeye and both sides promised to work towards elections. Tragically, the conflict had already claimed the lives of about 300,000 Burundians.

## Burundi Today

In 2004 the UN began operations in Burundi, sending more than 5000 troops to enforce the peace. Parliamentary elections were successfully held in June 2005 and the former rebels, the Forces for the Defence of Democracy (FDD), emerged victorious. FDD leader Pierre Nkurunziza was sworn in as president in August. One rebel group, the Forces for National Liberation (FNL), remains active in the country, but they are now fighting their former allies and a Hutu majority government. The country is finally on the road to stability and all sides need to embrace the spirit of national unity to bring Burundi back from the brink.

## CULTURE

Like Rwanda to the north, Burundi has been torn apart by tribal animosities. However, like most conflicts, it is more about politics than people, and it is the people that end up the victims of political manipulation. The Belgians masterminded the art of divide and rule, using the minority Tutsis to control the majority Hutus. The population was forced into choosing sides, Hutu or Tutsi.

Unlike Rwanda, Burundi debates its divisions. In Rwanda, there are only Rwandans, and the history is being reinterpreted in the spirit of unity. In Burundi, there are Hutus and Tutsis, and they work together in political parties and drink together in bars and discuss their differences. With two very different approaches to the same problem of ethnic division, both countries could learn a little from each other.

Burundi is more Francophone than any other country in the region, and city dwellers take their siesta seriously. Shops and businesses shut down from noon to 3pm. Do as the locals do and save some energy for the evening.

Out in the countryside, most of the people are engaged in farming, at least when they have not been fleeing the civil war as refugees in neighbouring countries. Coffee and tea are the main export crops.

## PEOPLE

Burundi's population comprises 84% Hutu, 15% Tutsi and 1% Twa Pygmies. Although the stormy relations between Hutu and Tutsi dominate the headlines, it is the Twa who have had the roughest deal, their forests stripped by successive outsiders.

## ARTS & CRAFTS

Burundi is famous for its athletic and acrobatic dances. *Les Tambourinaires* is the country's most famous troupe and they perform all over the world. Their performances are a high-adrenaline mix of drumming and dancing that drowns the audience in a wave of sound and movement.

## ENVIRONMENT

Rwanda may be the 'land of a thousand hills', but Burundi isn't far behind. The north is a stunning landscape of dramatic peaks and deep valleys, best experienced on the bus between Bujumbura and Kigali. Many of the mountains are carved with gravity-defying terraces that plunge into deep valleys below and farmers somehow eke a living out of the land. To the southwest, it levels out along the shores of lovely Lake Tanganyika and the capital, Bujumbura, is on the northern tip of this vast lake.

## FOOD & DRINK

Bujumbura is a contender for gastronomic capital of East Africa. *Brochettes* (kebabs) and *frites* (hot potato chips or french fries) are a legacy of the Belgian colonial period, but there is also succulent fish from Lake Tanganyika. When it comes to drink, Burundi is blessed with a national brewery churning out huge bottles of Primus and a very drinkable version of Amstel.

## BUJUMBURA

Bujumbura...the name is so exotic it just rumbas off the tongue. 'Buj', as many foreign residents refer to it, has a striking location on the shores of Lake Tanganyika and many of its suburbs sprawl up the looming mountains that ring the city to the north and east.

Comatose during the long civil war, the Burundian capital is a mixture of grandiose colonial town planning, with wide boulevards and imposing public buildings, and the dusty,

crowded streets that characterise the capitals in much of Africa. It is also one of the most important ports on Lake Tanganyika.

Bujumbura has a freewheelin' reputation and the dining, drinking and dancing scene can compete with the best in the region. That said, it's not the safest city by night, so it is important to take taxis after dark. Security has improved with the influx of UN peacekeepers, but robberies are still common.

A short way out of the city are some of Africa's best inland beaches. White sand, turquoise waters and beachside bars. Pinch yourself. This is Burundi, not the Caribbean.

## INFORMATION

**Banque du Crédit de Bujumbura** (Rue Science) and **Interbank Burundi** (Blvd de la Liberté) both offer credit-card cash advances but commissions are high. Both charge 2.5% plus a flat fee of €10. There's an open black market in Buj and dealers hang out on Chaussée Prince Rwagasore. Rates vary according to the official exchange rates and the amount to be changed.

There are internet cafés throughout the city centre.

**Face à Face** (Blvd de l'Uprona; ☎ 8am-10pm) A stylish internet caf with fast connections and tasty snacks.

**Main post office** (cnr Blvd Lumumba & Ave du Commerce; ☎ 8am-noon & 2-4pm Mon-Fri, 8-11am Sat) Phonecards and stamps.

**Office National du Tourisme** (☎ 22202; Ave des Euphorbes; ☎ 7.30am-noon & 2-4.30pm Mon-Fri) Not much in the way of handouts.

## DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Bujumbura is a more dangerous city than Kampala (Uganda) or Kigali (Rwanda), but is not quite in the league of Nairobi. It is generally safe to wander about on foot during the day. The character of the city changes around 8pm, as 'les petits bandits' move in. Take particular care near popular nightspots, as you never know who is lurking in the dark.

## SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Sights? That's a tough call. The biggest hitters are the beaches on Lake Tanganyika, by far the best in the region. The sand is white and powdery, and the waves should keep the bilarzia at bay. **Saga Beach** (pronounced Sagga) is the place to be, named in honour of the most popular bar here.

None of the so-called museums are really worth the time to visit, as they have been

long neglected. Opening times are as erratic as the collections. The **Musée Vivant** (Ave du 13 Octobre; admission BFr2000) is a reconstructed traditional Burundian village with some exhibits of baskets, pottery and drums, but it's also a part-time zoo and the animals aren't kept in impressive conditions.

## SLEEPING

Hotel prices in Bujumbura shot up when the UN came to town. This is a good city to indulge in something a bit nicer.

**Hôtel Le Doyen** (☎ 224378; Ave du Stade; BFr20,000, with air-con BFr35,000; ☺) This rambling old colonial-era building, set amid verdant grounds, has the cheapest rooms in the city, as its rates are in local currency rather than US dollars. Rooms have high ceilings and big bathrooms at the top end.

**Hotel Amahoro** (☎ 247550; Rue de l'Industrie; r US\$30-70; ☺) One of the newer hotels in Buj, the Amahoro has established a name for itself as a comfortable, centrally located place to stay with a good range of amenities. All rooms have satellite TV, fridge and hot water.

**Hotel Botanika** (☎ 226792; hotelbotanika@hotmail.com; Blvd de l'Uprona; s/d US\$60/70; ☺) Bujumbura's boutique hotel, the Botanika is a charming retreat from the rigours of life in Burundi. There are only seven rooms, and all come equipped with satellite TV, minibar and beautiful bathroom. It also has an excellent European restaurant.

## EATING & DRINKING

One of the best things about Bujumbura is the food. There are great bakeries, lively cafés and some of the finest restaurants in the region.

**Dmitri Supermarket** (Chaussée Prince Rwagasore) One of Buj's unexpected treats, this supermarket is the best stocked in town, selling Swiss chocolate, superb salami and European cheeses.

**Boulangerie-Pâtisserie Trianon** (Ave du Commerce; BFr500-2000) Always packed out for breakfast thanks to a great combination of fresh croissants and local coffee. Strangely, it's closed at lunchtime.

**Cercle Nautique** (☎ 222056; Ave de la Plage; mains BFr3000-10,000) The most famous spot in Bujumbura, the Cercle is one of those colonial-era clubs that remains resolutely popular thanks to good food and drinks aplenty. Set on the shores of Lake Tanganyika, this is a must when passing through Buj.



station near the market area. They usually dry up after lunchtime due to lingering security concerns.

## GETTING AROUND

To get to central Bujumbura from the airport costs about US\$10. On the return trip, you could take a taxi-motor (motorbike taxi) for about BFr2500.

After 8pm always take a taxi in the city, no matter how short the distance, as robberies are common.

# AROUND BUJUMBURA

## LA PIERRE DE LIVINGSTONE ET STANLEY

‘Dr Livingstone, I presume?’ The Burundians presume so. The Tanzanians presume not. This large rock at Mugere, about 10km south of the capital, is alleged to mark the spot where the infamous encounter between Livingstone and Stanley took place. Some graffiti marks the date as 25 November 1871. Ujiji in Tanzania is the other contender.

# AROUND BURUNDI

## GITEGA

Gitega, the second-largest town in Burundi, is home to the **National Museum** and a limited number of accommodation and restaurant options.

A good day trip from Gitega is to the **Chutes de la Kagera**, near Rutana. These waterfalls are spectacular in the wet season (October to January), but there’s no public transport there, so charter a taxi.

Double check the latest security situation before undertaking a road trip from Bujumbura to Gitega. Minibuses run throughout the day (US\$2, one hour).

## SOURCE DU NIL

This insignificant-looking little spring, southeast of Bujumbura, high up on the slopes of Mt Kikizi (2145m), is supposedly the southernmost source of the Nile. Naturally, the Ugandans dispute this, claiming the source as Jinja – where the Nile flows out of Lake Victoria. In Burundi ‘*le source*’ is no more than a trickle – not exactly a riveting sight – and access is impossible without a private

or chartered vehicle. Ask around at hotels in Bujumbura about vehicle rental, road conditions and the latest security situation.

## NATIONAL PARKS

The long civil war wiped the national parks off the map. However, they may begin to open up once again if peace holds.

**Parc National de la Kibira** is the largest rainforest in Burundi, part of the Parc National Nyungwe Forest in Rwanda, and home to hundreds of colobus monkeys and chimpanzees.

**Parc National de la Rurubu** is the largest park in the country, with wonderful hiking and expansive views.

The most accessible national park is **Parc National de la Rusizi** (admission US\$1.50), 15km from Bujumbura. It’s a wetland environment, and provides a habitat for hippos, sitatungas (aquatic antelopes) and a wide variety of birds.

# BURUNDI DIRECTORY

## DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Burundi’s long civil war appears to be coming to an end. However, it is a young peace and things could kick off again, so don’t do too much exploring unless you are 101% certain things are safe. It’s currently considered safe to travel by land to and from Rwanda. Travelling south along the shores of Lake Tanganyika to Tanzania may emerge as a popular way to link the mountain gorillas of Rwanda with the chimps of Gombe Stream.

Kigali (Rwanda) and Kigoma (Tanzania) are probably the best places to pick up reliable information about current events in Burundi.

## PRACTICALITIES

- Burundi uses the metric system and distances are in kilometres.
- Electricity in Burundi is 240V, 50 cycles, and plugs are mainly of the European two-round-pin variety.
- The local press includes French-language *Le Renouveau*.
- Government-controlled Radio Burundi broadcasts in Kirundi, French, Swahili and English.

## EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

### Burundian Embassies & Consulates

**Belgium** (✉ 02-23 045 35; 46 Place Marie-Louise, Brussels)

**France** (✉ 01 45 20 60 61; 24 Rue Raynouard, Paris)

**Rwanda** (✉ 226865; Ave du RD Congo, Bujumbura)

**Tanzania** (Lugalo St, Upanga; ✉ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri)

One-month single-entry visas cost US\$45 plus two photos and are issued within 24 hours. Burundi also has a consulate in Kigoma.

**UK** (✉ 020-8381 4092; 26 Armitage Rd, London)

**USA** (✉ 202-342 2574; 2233 Wisconsin Ave, Washington DC)

### Embassies & Consulates in Burundi

Foreign embassies in Bujumbura include the following:

**Belgium** (✉ 233641; Blvd de la Liberté)

**DRC** (Ave du RD Congo)

**France** (✉ 251484; 60 Blvd de l'Uprona)

**Rwanda** (✉ 226865; Ave du RD Congo)

**Tanzania** (✉ 248636; 4 United Nations Rd)

**USA** (✉ 223454; Chaussée Prince Rwagasore)

## HOLIDAYS

Some of these holidays may change as the new government of national unity grows in confidence.

**New Year's Day** 1 January

**Labour Day** 1 May

**Independence Day** 1 July

**Assumption Day** 5 August

**Anniversary of Rwagasore's Assassination** 13 October

**All Saints' Day** 1 November

## MONEY

There are no ATMs in Burundi. It's a cash economy and the US dollar is king. Come with cash unless you like giving lots of money in commissions to banks, particularly for travellers' cheques – some charge up to 7%. There are no ATMs in Burundi. For banks in Bujumbura, see p614.

## POST & TELEPHONE

The postal service is reasonably efficient. There are no telephone area codes within the country.

## VISAS

Visas are required by all, and are best obtained from a Burundian embassy before arrival. Two photographs are required and visas are often available in the afternoon if you apply

early in the morning. One-month tourist visas cost US\$40.

## Visas for Onward Travel

Visas for DRC, Rwanda and Tanzania are available from respective embassies in Bujumbura (see left for contact details).

# TRANSPORT IN BURUNDI

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

### Air

Located about 12km north of the city centre, **Bujumbura International Airport** (BJM) has flights connecting Bujumbura with Kigali (Rwanda), Kampala (Uganda), Nairobi (Kenya) and Addis Ababa (Ethiopia).

**Air Burundi** (✉ 223460; [airbdi@cbinf.com](mailto:airbdi@cbinf.com); Ave du Commerce)

**Ethiopian Airlines** (✉ 226820; [www.flyethiopian.com](http://www.flyethiopian.com); Ave Victoire)

**Kenya Airways** (✉ 223542; [www.kenya-airways.com](http://www.kenya-airways.com); Place de l'Indépendance)

**Rwandair Express** (✉ 251850; [www.rwandair.com](http://www.rwandair.com); Ave du Commerce)

### Land

#### RWANDA

The main crossing point is between Kayanza and Butare on the main road linking Bujumbura and Kigali. The border is at Kayanza Haut.

The safest and quickest option for travel between Bujumbura and Kigali is to use one of the scheduled bus services that depart daily. Yahoo Car, New Yahoo Express, Venus Travel and Gaso Bus all run buses in both directions. Most companies offer the choice of a big bus or a minibus, the latter costing less as it is more crowded and considered less secure.

### CROSSING BY LAND INTO BURUNDI?

Burundi was long wiped off the overland map due to the intractable civil war in the country. Check the security situation very carefully from the safety of Rwanda before venturing down here. Crossing into Tanzania, the safest bet is to follow the road south along the Tanganyika lakeshore, as the flat landscape and lack of forest cover isn't suitable for staging ambushes.

### CROSSING INTO DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO?

Think twice, maybe three times, before crossing into DRC. Things have been very volatile there during the terrible years of civil war, so it is extremely important to do your own homework before visiting.

Prices cost BFr9000 to BFr12,000 and departures are all around 8am.

There is also a direct road from Bujumbura to Cyangugu at the southern tip of Lake Kivu in Rwanda, but this is not in good condition.

### TANZANIA

There are several border crossings between Burundi and Tanzania, including one near Kobero in the north of the country and one near Nyanza Lac in the south of the country,

which connects with Gombe Stream National Park and Kigoma in western Tanzania. However, due to the uncertain security situation in the east of the country during research, we were unable to travel to these areas. Ask around in Bujumbura for more details.

The lake steamers that used to connect Bujumbura with Kigoma and Mpulungu (Zambia) are not currently operating, but ask around in the capital in case the situation changes.

### GETTING AROUND

The national airline, **Air Burundi** (✉ 223460; [airbdi@cbinf.com](mailto:airbdi@cbinf.com); Ave du Commerce, Bujumbura), does not operate internal flights.

Most major roads in Burundi are sealed and public transport is mainly by minibus. Destinations are displayed in the front window and they depart when full. They depart throughout the day from the *gare routière* (bus station) in any town.

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